HORATIO ALGER

There are names you hear all the time and some of them you know right away and some you think you ought to know but don't and others you are curious enough about to look up in a reference book, but what you ought to know after looking at enough encyclopedias and other reference works is that these books seldom contain the truth; indeed, most of them contain biased, censored, and whitewashed versions of reality; they are, en fin, what someone at some time wanted the rest of the culture to accept as true. Horatio Alger fits neatly into this category, being the 'father of the American dream.' When people hear his name, they think of ordinary newsboys striving and succeeding in their efforts to go from rags to riches. You can almost see those true-blue, clean-living, pure-minded young saints marching down the glory road bearing the banner of benevolent capitalism.

And the first biography of Alger, that one made up by Herbert Mayes in 1928, the one used as a critical source by John Tebbel for FROM RAGS TO RICHES and John Gardner for HORATIO ALGER AND THE AMERICAN DREAM, catered to this notion of Alger as the great-granddaddy of Eagle Scout consciousness in America. People believed Mayes because he had become editor of GOOD HOUSEKEEPING, a director of SATURDAY REVIEW, and finally President of the McCALL Corporation. Only Malcolm Cowley was curious about the lack of documentation in Mayes. It was not until Edwin P. Hoyt went back to the town and newspaper records and did the basic research on Horatio Alger, Jr. that the truth about this writer of boy's books was finally made public. You'll find the documented evidence in HORATIO'S BOYS: THE LIFE AND WORKS OF HORATIO ALGER, JR. [Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton Book Company, 1974].

Alger has a lot in common with Charles Ludwigge Dodgson. Both were born in 1832. Both had their first successful books published in 1865, ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND and PAUL PRESCOTT'S CHARGE respectively. Both were the sons of ministers and while Dodgson never took his vows, Horatio Jr. graduated from Harvard in 1851 and became a Unitarian minister like his Daddy. Both were physically small. Alger was 5 foot 2 and weighed about 130 pounds. He wore a moustache and his hair thinned early. Both stammered as boys. Alger did not talk until he was six years old. Though he was the second child, he was sickly and immature and never played the role of older brother in his family, though he was later to play that role with a number of his boy friends. Dodgson was suspected of being a pedophile, mainly because of his interest in and photography of pre-pubescent girls, but there is no evidence in his diaries on letters or, indeed, in any of his correspondence with others, that he ever acted on his desire for young girls. A man who grew up with a large number of little sisters for which he cared and for whom he made up little plays, Dodgson simply continued his boyhood behavior into his mature years, using his ALICE books to make friends of little girls. Indeed, when he heard the rumors about himself, he quit his photography hobby entirely. He died in 1898, a year before Alger.

Horatio Alger, Jr., on the other hand was not only accused of pederasty with young boys, but was caught at it. He did not proclaim his innocence, rather he confessed to his indiscretion, resigned his position as minister of the Unitarian Church of Brewster, Massachusetts, and left town that very night in 1866 for fear that some of the members of his outraged congregation might lynch him. Hoyt put it this way: *Thomas Crocker, Elisha Bangs and Moderator Gould came in with the dreadful report. Crocker had started [his investigation] at home with his own son, Thomas S. Crocker, and from him had learned that the Reverend Mr. Alger had been buggering him. Not only him, but John Clark, too, and perhaps there were others. The shocked senior Crocker wished to go no further. We learn from John Clark and Thomas S. Crocker that Horatio Alger, Jr. has been practicing on them at different times deeds that are too revolting to relate* (5). Confronted by the committee from his church, Alger confessed that he had been 'imprudent.' Reverend Alger added that *under the circumstances he considered his connection with the Unitarian Society of Brewster to be dissolved.*

Adds Hoyt: *The fact is that even in his college days, Horatio was tutoring young boys, and whatever his relationships with them in that period, there is no hint anywhere in what is known of his life that he ever looked at a girl, except his sister, and that in a most brotherly way (21).*

To please his father, Alger attended Harvard Divinity School in 1847. He lived on campus and earned his room and board by running errands for the president Edward Everett. Alger rebelled against his father's strictness and would often sneak out of prayers to go into Boston and enjoy the night life. His first publication was an article on chivalry in the Pictorial National Library in Boston. He showed his literary bent quite early, writing about everything. He even wrote an article entitled THE IMMORTALITY OF BOOT SOLES, not to mention a sentimental little poem called "The Death of LIttle Alice." He graduated with Phi Betta Kappa with honors in 1851 and gave the English oration at his graduation.

Alger's fame has a lot to do with a chance meeting between himself and William Taylor Adams. Adams

wrote boy's stories under the name Oliver Optic. An ardent opponent of strong drink, he came to Marlborough to preach against the demon rum, met Alger, read some of his stories, and suggested he might find a publisher for them. Adams took Alger's material to Brown, Bazin, and Co. in Boston and they published Alger's first book, BERTHA'S CHRISTMAS VISION. But the book in which Alger found his formula was PAUL PRESCOTT'S CHARGE in 1865, a Civil War story. Adams was hired as editor of STUDENT AND SCHOOLMATE, becoming Alger's literary supporter and guru. Many of Alger's early books were first serialized in this magazine, then reprinted as books.

Alger went to New York after his ministerial indiscretion and established himself there. He now considered himself a professional writer. BHe took his subject matter from the streets and it was always credible and realistic, however stretched his melodramatic plots. As Hoyt noted, *RAGGED DICK was a very thorough and direct guide to the places and people of New York City in the year 1866, and for that reason if no other it approached the realm of literature, a claim that will doubtless be gainsaid by critics* (78). In RAGGED DICK [One of the few Alger books you will find in your bookstore in 1988], Alger *chronicled the everyday life of the middle and lower class in the city in a way it had not been done before* (79). Alger said it was right to be decent, honest, reasonable, scrupulous and moral, but what really counted was luck. This was the essence of the Alger formula. A young boy having a tough time of it on the streets would be standing on a corner when the daughter of a banker fell in front of a carriage. The boy would save her from the horses' hooves and he would be rewarded with thirty years behind a desk in the bank. That was rags to riches. Oh, sometimes the boy married the girl, in which case, he really got rich, but usually his climb up the ladder was one from the street into the office. RAGGED DICK was a best seller in 1867 after running as a serial in STUDENT AND SCHOOLMATE. Alger was doing in America what Dickens had done in England. The main difference was that Alger was locked into a juvenile market, while Dickens had an adult readership. Horatio was never able to make the transition though he did try several adult novels. Both Dickens and Alger were popular writers in their time, both serialized their work, but many of Dickens' novels are now considered literary classics, while all of Alger's are considered hack work.

A philanthropist named Charles Loring Brace, upset by the thousands of homeless boys on the streets of New York, started an association to help them. In the 1860s, the Newsboys' Lodging House was at 49 Park Place and in 1869, Brace recorded that 8,835 different boys had lived in the house for various periods. Alger got to know Brace and Brace introduced him to the Newsboy scene. Alger used the boys as a source for his books. He kept a bed there and often slept there. Supplementing his income by tutoring a couple of wealthy children, Alger's routine circa 1872 was to write three books a year. He would live part of the time in his own apartment, part at the Newsboys' and spend the rest of his time at the mansion. *He played fairy godfather to the boys, helping them with their problems, finding some of them jobs, sending some to school, giving entertainments and parties for them, sending them out to the country or paying their fare to places where jobs had been found for them* (121). Having learned his lesson in Brewster, Alger was now discreet and there is no further evidence of any misbehavior with young boys. Indeed, there is more evidence that Alger redeemed himself.

While he continued to exploit the boys by using their stories as his subject matter, he spent a lot of the royalties helping the boys get jobs, getting them out of the city, paying for their educations, buying them clothes so they could make a decent appearance at job interviews. Wherever Alger went, he always took a couple of boys with him, but, said Hoyt, *there was no hint of scandal* (215).

Alger developed a successful formula for boy's fiction. He and his publishers knew what young American boys wanted. A boy hero, plenty of adventure, little or no discussion of girls, some good rugged violence, events turning against the bullies and villains, the land and loan sharks, and wealth, if not fame, to the young hero. Alger did write a couple of books aimed at girls, but sales figures revealed their lack of interest. Edward Stratemeyer, who was go to on to create the Rover Boys and the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew, was a fan of Alger's style. Indeed, when Alger died of an asthma attack at Old Orchard Beach on July 18, 1899, Ed finished several of his manuscripts. In the 1930s and 40s, librarians decided Alger's books were trash and most of them were thrown out of the libraries. They are seriously collected today and it is rare to see a first edition although most antique stores have a few of the Donahue reprints sitting around. The rarest Alger is TIMOTHY CRUMP'S WARD, which is valued at $1,000. The Brandeis University has the Max Goldberg Collection. The collector should consult John Gardner's HORATIO ALGER AND THE AMERICAN DREAM, which contains a complete listing of the various editions of Alger's more than 135 books.

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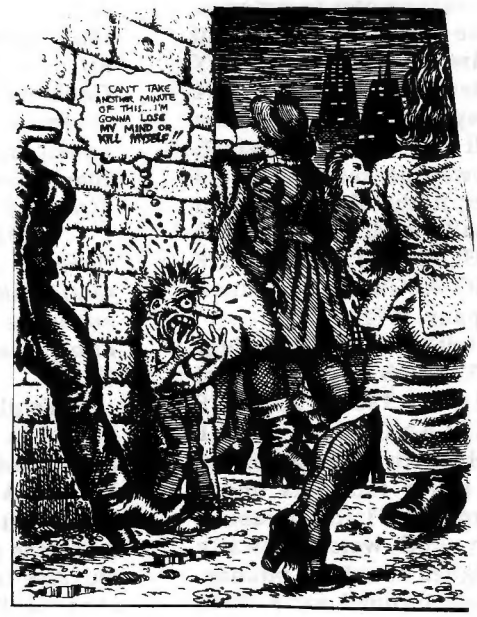

CRUMB KEEPS ON ON-ING

While the media gave underground comix a reputation for sex and violence, it was actually the artists' movement toward realism and personal honesty that distinguished undergrounds from their earlier predecessors. One may follow the history of Robert Crumb from his first ZAP to the current issue of WEIRDO [21, from Last Gasp Comix]. If there is anything he has not confessed about his own past and behavior, one need only wait awhile and he'll get to it. In the latest WEIRDO, Crumb published a group of sketches dealing with his difficulties with women, his penchant for strange and unusual sex, and his problems as a parent. C.G.

Drawings © R. Crumb, 1988.

UNDERGROUND COMIX CATALOG
Once again I have revised my catalog of underground comix. $1 gets you a listing of 700 titles, including reading copies and rarities, 'homegrowns' and major titles. CRUMB, BODĒ, CORBEN, and SPIEGELMAN are all here.
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